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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 005937

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, EB/ESC/TFS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2015

TAGS: [EFIN](#) [KTFN](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: POST,S ASSESSMENT OF CASH COURIER ENVIRONMENT

REF: A. TREASURY DTG 011853Z NOV 05

[1](#)B. REF B: DAMASCUS 329

Classified By: Classified By: CDA Stephen Seche for reasons 1.b. and d.

[11.](#) (U) This cable is post,s informal, in-house assessment of the cash courier environment in Syria as per ref A tasking.

[12.](#) (C) The SARG has restrictions for bringing money into or out of the country but the requirement to declare is neither well publicized nor visible when traveling through customs. Enforcement depends on the individual customs official deciding to physically search the traveler to check compliance. In practice, enforcement is arbitrary but if found to be in violation, the customs agent is empowered to seize all of the individual,s cash. Syrians can take 3000USD out of the country on each trip and nonresidents 5000USD. The amount increases to 30,000USD for anyone seeking medical care abroad. Customs officials are largely ill-trained and unaware of cash courier problems. Customs officials are underpaid and known to be easily corrupted. Because Syria is a cash-based economy, smuggling is a recurrent and systematic problem. Syria does not yet have a functioning financial intelligence unit, therefore, there is little sharing of information on cash smuggling between host-country agencies.

[13.](#) (C) The SARG has reviewed FATF special recommendation IX. Embassy Damascus has engaged the SARG on cash couriers on a number of occasions over the last 12 months, especially as they pertain to Iraq. The SARG has expressed some concern but claims it needs international assistance to be able to take effective action to address the issue.

[14.](#) (C) The SARG has received assistance from the EU on establishing a financial intelligence unit but nothing specific to cash couriers that we are aware of. The SARG would welcome assistance from the USG. The SARG gave us a list of equipment needed to improve enforcement (ref B). SECHE